R E P O R T R E S U M E S

ED 011 326 24 ED 011 326

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A MEASURE OF SELF-CONCEPT.

BY- SILVER, NANCY

REPORT NUMBER BR-5-0215-26 PUB DATE 19 OCT 65
CONTRACT OEC-5-10-239
EDRS PRICE MF-$0.09 HC-$0.92 23P.

DESCRIPTORS- *MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS, *MEASUREMENT TECHNIQUES, *SELF CONCEPT, Q SORT, *ADOLESCENTS, RATING SCALES, INTERVIEWS, QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES, CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES, *TEST SELECTION, CAMBRIDGE

A MEASURE OF SELF-CONCEPT, CONSISTING OF A SERIES OF THREE TESTS, WAS RECOMMENDED TO AID THE STUDY OF ADOLESCENCE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL AND TO PROVIDE THE ADOLESCENT WITH A KNOWLEDGE OF SELF-CONCEPT THAT COULD HELP IN DECISION MAKING, PERCEPTION, AND THE ACQUISITION OF VALUES. SELF-CONCEPT RESEARCH AND THEORIES WERE REVIEWED AND REPORTED, AND VARIOUS CONCEPTUAL VIEWPOINTS WERE DISCUSSED. STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF SUCH SELF-CONCEPT MEASUREMENT INSTRUMENTS AS CHECKLISTS, Q-SORTS, RATING SCALES, OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS, AND VARIOUS PROJECTIVE DEVICES WERE ANALYZED. THE RECOMMENDED MEASURE CONSISTED OF THREE TEST ITEMS SELECTED TO COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER. THESE ITEMS WERE A Q-SORT, A SENTENCE-COMPLETION BLANK, AND AN INTERVIEW. A SAMPLE OF THE PROPOSED TEST ITEMS WAS INCLUDED IN THE REPORT. (AL)

ED011326

BR-5-0215-26
OEC-5-10-239
P.A.24

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education.
This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated do not necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

Recommendations for a Measure of Self-Concept.

Nancy Silver
October 19, 1965

Table of Contents

Introduction	page 2
Review of Self-Concept Theory	2
Methods of Measuring Self-Concept	5
Recommendations	11
Appendix	15
Bibliography	18

The study of "self-concept" has a definite place in the study of the adolescent in the secondary school. For the development and understanding of one's self-concept is closely related to the process of decision making which is a crucial concern in the life of the adolescent. Super describes the role of self concept in vocational choice and adjustment. "Tracing the processes of making a vocational choice and adjusting to an occupation is, essentially, describing two processes - that of developing a picture of the kind of person one is, and that of trying to make that concept a reality." Choosing an occupation can be a means of implementing a self-concept. For at such a point in his life, the young person is asked to state rather explicitly his concept of himself, to say definitely "I am this or that kind of person." Super goes on to demonstrate the continued role of self-concept in vocational adjustment: "holding and adjusting to a job is for the typical beginning worker a process of finding out, first, whether that job permits him to play the kind of role he wants to play, secondly, whether the role the job makes him play is compatible with his self-concept (whether the unforeseen elements can be assimilated into the self or modified to suit the self); and finally, it is a process of testing his self-concept against reality, of finding out whether he can actually live up to his cherished picture of himself."

In addition, a study of self-concept is important in

understanding the adolescent in his school environment because perception of the self tends to affect other perceptions and behavior. Combs and Snygg (1959) contend that "since the purpose of an individual's behavior is the satisfaction of his own need, the perceptual field is usually organized with reference to the behavor's own phenomenal self. The meaning of an object or event is thus his definition of the relationship between the object and himself." The "phenomenal self," as the central point of the perceptual field, is the point of orientation for the individual's behavior. It is the "frame of reference in terms of which all other perceptions gain their meaning," the frame from which all else is observed. (Combs and Snygg, 1959)

Thus, self-concept influences decision making and perception, critical factors in the process of "adolescing." One can note a third area where impact of one's self-concept would be felt - the process of acquisition of values. For, the very definition of self, the formation of one's self-concept, involves the selection of values.

It is appropriate at this point to present a brief review of self-concept theory. This will not be a comprehensive effort but rather an attempt to demonstrate various conceptual viewpoints. It will be noticeable that in spite of slightly different perspectives there are also essential similarities.

Carl Rogers (reported in Wylie, 1961.) describes the self-concept "as an organized configuration of perceptions of one's characteristics and abilities; the percepts and concepts of the self in relation to others and to the environment; the value qualities which are perceived as associated with experiences and objects; and goals and ideals which are perceived as having positive or negative valence."

Kohas (1964) distinguishes between "self," "conceptof self," and "self concept," and defines the latter as "the organization of the system of generalizations a person has about himself; the cluster of the most personal meanings a person attributes to himself."

Hilgard (1949) describes a hypothetical, inferred self which is a social product and which has full meaning only when expressed in social interaction. Strong and Feder (1961) also discuss self-concept in terms of inferences. "Every evaluative statement that a person makes concerning himself can be considered a sample of his self-concept, from which inferences may then be made about the various properties of that self-concept."

Combs and Snygg (1959) discuss "concepts of self" which they define as "those more or less discrete perceptions of self which the individual regards as part, or characteristic, of his being." The self is differentiated throughout life; we continually discover, with greater and greater clarity who and what we are. The organization of all the ways an individual has of seeing himself is called the "phenomenal

self." By the phenomenal self is meant "the individual's own unique organization of ways of regarding self; it is the Gestalt of his concept of self." The phenomenal self is the "self in situation." (Combs and Snygg, 1959) Combs and Snygg suggest that the "self-conept" is an approximation of a larger organization, not synonymous with it. This theoretical point may be important to bear in mind when evaluating measures of self-concept; measures are essentially indirect and incomplete representations of the individual's view of himself. Combs and Soper (1957) defined the self-concept as "the organization of all that the individual refers to as 'I' or 'me'.... a patterned relationship or 'gestalt.'" They ascribe to it a degree of stability and consistency which gives predicatbility to the individual and his behavior.

Super who is interested in vocational development and adjustment, defines self-concept in terms of role structure. He first defines the "simple self-concept": "organized related percepts with accrued meaning." (1963b). On this he builds "the complex self-concept" which is an "abstraction from and generalization of simple self concepts, generally organized in a role framework." (1963b)

In this brief review I have not attempted to abstract a specific working definition of "self-concept." Rather I have tried to present several lines of thought in order to have a broad conceptual understanding of the term. With this foundation it is now possible to describe the various

ways of measuring self-concept. The strengths and limitations of each method will be pointed out. Out of this consideration, ceratin reccomendations will be made.

The Q Technique was developed by Stephenson in 1953. It is essentially a correlation of persons rather than of tests. Actually it is the correlation of the results obtained by giving many tests to two or more persons on one occasion. "It makes possible the study of one person (ideographic) or the comparison of an individual's concept of himself with similar self concepts of others. It permits correlation and factor analysis,of arrays of scores for different persons or for the same person under different conditions of experimentation.... applies to 'subjective' data involving a person's self-description." (Strong and Feder, 1961)

The "Q Sort" is a derivation of the Q technique. This entails a sorting of various statements on cards under certain given instructions. The procedure requires the subject to sort a number of self-reference statements (usually 70-150) into a series of piles or classes along a continuum of appropriateness or accuracy of self-description, from those that are "least like" him to those that are "most like" him. The number of items sorted into each pile is specified in such a way that the resulting frequency distribution approximates that of a normal distribution. Following Stephenson's method, Butler and Haigh (1954) developed an universe of self-reference statements. It consists of

of a set of 100 statements which were taken at random from available therapeutic protocols. According to the Butler-Haigh method, these statements are sorted by the individual to describe himself(the self-concept), how he would like to be (the ideal-sort), and what the ordinary person is like (the ordinary sort). The "ordinary sort" is frequently omitted or replaced. For example, in Kehas's study (1964) Ss were asked to sort the adjectives three times: self, ideal and teacher's ideal. "A discrepancy between the self-concept and the concept of the desired or ideal self is viewed as reflecting a sense of shlf-dissatisfaction or maladjustment. It is hypothesized that a reduction in self-ideal discrepancies results from the self-concept and the ideal concept coming to rest upon a broader base of available experience than previously." (Strong and Feder, 1961)

A major limitation of the Q sort method is that it is time consuming since it must be administered individually, and it may be expensive to score and evaluate (particularly if there are several sorts, long lists of adjectives and many subjects). Another limitation is that although Q technique provides for certain uniqueness in measurement, the correlation of persons does not take into strict account certain mean differences. "Individuals may be grouped according to similarity in profiles but may be entirely different in personality structure." (Strong and Feder, 1961)

Many devices constructed to measure self-concept utilize ratings based on a five-point scale. Statements or personality traits are rated on a scale usually ranging from "never" or "seldom" to "very often" or "most of the time" applicable to the individual who is rating himself. The values of the ratings are then used as numerical weights to arrive at a total score for all the items. (Strong and Feder, 1961) An example of such a rating method is the Self-Rating Inventory developed by Brownfain (1952). The Inventory consists of twenty-five descriptive traits, each of which is defined at the high and low ends of the continuum by a brief paragraph. Each subject rates himself as to "private self," "positive self," "negative self," and"social self." The difference score between positive and negative self-ratings is referred to as the "stability index." In essence, the Inventory is an operational measure of the stability of the self concept measured in terms of the discrepancy between the self as it is both positively and negatively conceived." Self-esteem is the primary psychological dimension measured by this scale.

The rating scale method results in an objective total score which is usually obtained by simply summing the ratings assigned to each item. "The process of summation tends to obliterate the uniqueness of individual items and may obscure important clues to certain isolated self-perceptions. The assumption is also made that all the items included hold equal importance in the calculations of a final score." (Strong and Feder, 1961) Another problem inherent in this

method is that the subject may unwittingly produce spurious results by yielding to the tendency of rating consistently in the direction of the middle or the extremes as a carry-over effect from one item to the next.

Questions or open-ended sentences have been used to a limited extent as a method of measuring self-concept. This technique gives a projective quality to the responses and offers the opportunity for the full expression of psychological needs. The answers obtained in this manner can be scored objectively according to preselected categories. Bugental and Zelen (1949; 1950) have devised a "tool for identifying self-percepts by securing a categorization of the varying self-concepts reported in different social and experimental areas." The subject is asked to write three answers or responses to the question "Who are you?" Within the theoretical framework of phenomenological theory, the replies are analyzed along seventeen dimensions or categories for significances of intra- and inter-group differences. Although this question has projective qualities, the explicit content of the responses lends itself to categorical analysis. "... when analyzed, the body of responses to the W-A-Y has certain stable characteristics in terms of being describable in a limited number of content categories. This description remains relatively stable even when the total body of responses has been broken into subdivisions and contrasted in terms of certain sociological dimensions." (Strong and Feder, 1961) Parks (1951) extended the W-A-Y technique to

include eight questions with two answers to each. Responses to these questions are rated on a continuum going from egoistically oriented self response to altruistic socially oriented response. "Insight" responses are also scored for adequacy on a continuum.. Sentence Completion Blank has been used as a method for studying self-concept within the framework of personality structure. "It provides a single measure of over-all adjustment, but the statements can also be used as self-concept items." (Strong and Feder, 1961)

In giving a projective quality to the responses, the free response methods are rather difficult to quantify and score objectively. Any type of scoring procedure rests for the most part upon the subjective judgment of the scorer himself. It is also frequently a problem to classify some of the responses according to the preselected categories. "Validity can be quite difficult to ascertain at times with this method, and so-called 'face-validity' is often advanced. There exists a definite need for validation of a construct type." (Strong and Feder, 1961)

The check list method consists of having the individual check the appropriate adjectives or statements that describe himself or the other persons being evaluated. A variety of check lists have been used for research and counseling. Leary (1957) classified the multilevel pattern of interpersonal responses expressed by the individual into five levels (Public Communication, Conscious Description, Private Symbolization, Unexpressed Unconscious and Values). The Interpersonal Check List, an inventory consisting of 128

descriptive words and phrases, measures levels II and V. The level of conscious description reflects how the subject chooses to present himself to the world. Level V, the level of values, is the ego ideal, or what he would like to be. A study comparing achievers and underachievers by Shaw, et al (1960) employed the Sarbin Adjective Check List as a measure of self-concept because of its high reliability, simplicity of administration and scoring, and wide coverage of personality characteristics to which the subject may respond. It consists of 200 adjectives and the respondent is asked to place a check in front of those adjectives he feels characteristic of himself. The Matteson Self-Evaluation Scale focuses attention upon indices of aspiration and discrepancy. "The general form provides for an expression of the conceived self as the student sees himself at the present time, the projected self as he hopes to be two years hence, and the reflected self as he thinks others see him. Scoring provides for an Aspiration Index, which indicates the extent to which hopes to better himself, and a Discrepancy Index, which denotes the extent to which the individual feels that his concept of self does not coincide with concepts of himself held by others." (Strong and Feder, 1961) It should be noted that this device only measures self-concept indirectly. The Merrill and Heatherd Checklist is used in counseling to give some evaluation of the client's self-concept.

Adjectives are checked by the client as usually description or not descriptive of himself.

The major limitation of the check list method is that it provides no structure for qulitatively rating the separate items involved. Each item is treated in an all-or-nothing fashoin. There is no way of determining the degree of involvement that the items have for the individual.

In making a recommendation for a device to be used to study self-concept I feel it is necessary to suggest a series of tests, some of which can be incorporated into other parts of the investigation. Indiscussing each part of the proposed series , difficulties will be noted. In providing three methods, it is hoped that these limitations will be compensated.

A Q sort based on Kehas's procedure (1964) is suggested because it has been successfully used in a similar situation, and it provides an operational definition of self-concept. ("The correlation between self and ideal sort equals the measure of self-concept, that is, measure of the organization or the system of generalizations a person has about himself.") Another reason for recommending a Q sort is that it has been successfully used to demonstrate relative stability of self-concept in adolescents. (Engel, 1959) This suggests that such a test can tap the essential and relatively stable elements of a developing self-concept. Certain revisions of Kehas's pool of adjectives would be

necessary because he was mainly interested in achievement in school as well as ways in which adolescents define themselves. Certain facets of adolescent self-concept should guide the selection of adjectives: for example, those that can be categorized as relating to "self-esteem," "body images," "masculine-feminine identity" "commitment, values," and "abilities." Selecting adjectives by categories will be helpful in the subsequent scoring of the Q sorts; that is, instead of evaluating n adjectives, it will be possible to rate and compare four or five categories. Another procedure for gathering the adjectives would be to ask a group of adolescents to list words which describe themselves. From these could be selected a relavant pool which could be classified for eventual scoring.

Presumably in such a test, the self-concept guides the self-description. "A self-rating, when it is valid, is accurate only because the testee's entire personality is such that he can properly evaluate himself under the circumstances." (Elias, 1951) A score from a Q sort, more than a measure of self-concept, is a conceptualization of a person by an outside agent (the scoring machine and the scoring keys) based on his lower level self-concepts. "The lower level self-concepts (self descriptions) are organized into higher level concepts of the subject not by himself, but by the scoring system." (Super, 1963a) It also must be remembered that in providing a limited number of adjectives from which an individual must describe

his self, boundaries have already been placed on the possible elements of his self-concepts. Thus, if an important facet is not represented in the pool, it will be unable to be expressed.

A second procedure to complement the Q sort would be a sentence completion blank. (Such a test could be used as a method to test other aspects of this study - for example, there could be stems directed toward the student's view of school, the world, his future, etc.) "An unstructured question permits greater leeway for personality projection; therefore, it should reflect personality tendencies more sensitively than more structured items." (Ellias, 1951) This could take the form simply of an "I am..." type of statement which reveals the subjects of conceptualization of himself. Or, there can be several stems potentially evocative of self description. Again, the students can be turned to to provide these phrases. They could be asked to list several sentences which describe themselves and their lives; from these could be selected those partial sentences to be used.

Finally, I see the need for some sort of interview (or perhaps part of one already planned). There is value to be gained in direct questioning of adolescents about their self-concepts; many will be able to articulate quite vividly. Super(1963b) discusses the necessity of self reports:

> if one does not use self reports, if the individual does not in some way tell how he sees himself, there is no way of knowing whether the individual is aware of and uses the self-concept, there is no way of knowing whether the self-concept exists. Even scores on adjective checklists or personality or interest inventories cannot be viewed as direct expression of the individual's higher level formulation of his self-concept, for such instruments tell one whether or not the subject's simple self-concepts resemble those of the persons in the norm group, for example, but they do not tell whether or not the subject himself has organized these self percepts into a concept of himself as bricklayer or engineer -- it is the scoring key and its constructors who organized the concepts. The typical correlation of interest inventory scales and self-ratings of .50 (eg Berdie, 1950) is evidence of the fact that self-organized and other-organized simple self-concepts are related but by no means identical.

There are, however, limitations on the accuracy of the self report. The degree to which self reports can be relied upon depends on:

> clarity of S's awareness
> lack of adequate symbols for expression
> social expectancy
> cooperation of S [rapport]
> freedom from threat [includes anonymity]
> personal adequacy
>
> (Combs and Soper, 1957)

Super (1963b) adds the variables of set and openendness to those affecting accuracy of self report. Loevinger (reported in Super, 1963b) stresses "the importance of the sophistication or conventionality of the subject, as affecting defenses against revealing the true self." It is for these reasons that I have suggested a composite view of self-concept and recommended three different measures -- Q sort, sentence completion, interview. It is felt that they are complementary and draw out various aspects of the self-concept and counter several limitations.

APPENDIX:

Examples of possible test items

The Q Sort Adjective List used in Kohas's study (1964)

1. purposeful
dreamy
impressionable
conscientious
5. sense of humor
distractable
intense
studious
lazy
10. bright
sensitive
lonely
understanding
dominating
15. competitive
motivated
intelligent
submissive
assertive
[illegible]
20. ambitious
scholarly
different
self-reliant
controlled
25. responsible
aggressive
disturbed
confused
shy
30. hard-working
relaxed
likable
attractive
35. insecure
tolerant
inhibited
poised
self-centered
40. impulsive
worthless
unreliable
contented
disorganized
45. rational
warm
suspicious
friendly
hostile
50. sociable

Note: It is, of course, expected that there will be modification of this list, selecting adjectives that might be more appropriate for a direct study of self-concept (without the specific concern for achievement)

Selected "stubs" from a sentence completion blank used by Friedenberg (1959)

When I'm 30 I expect to be:

I guess I'm;

I feel proud when:

When I feel very happy, I:

I feel very happy when:

Kids need:

Kids should:

Most people think of me as:

When people criticize me, I:

Love is:

When something gets me real mad, I;

I'm not really very much like:

The worst thing about me is:

In picking my life work, the most important thing is:

Bibliography

Bronson, Gordon. "Identity diffusion in late adolescents." J abnorm soc Psychol, 1959, 59, 414-417.

Brownfain, John. "Stability of the self-concept as a dimension of personality." J abnorm soc Psychol, 1952, 47, 597-606.

Combs, Arthur and Donald Snygg. Individual Behavior. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959.

Combs, Arthur and Daniel Soper. "The self, its derivate terms, and research." J Indiv Psychol, 1957, 13, 134-145.

Elias, Gabriel. Self-evaluative questionnaires as projective measures of personality. J consult Psychol, 1951, 15, 496-500.

Engel, Mary. "The stability of the self-concept in adolescence." J abnorm soc Psychol, 1959, 58, 211-215.

Erikson, Erik. Identity and the Life Cycle. New York: International Universities Press, Inc., 1959.

Field, Frank, Chris Kehas and David Tiedeman. "The self-concept in career development: a construct in transition. Personnel guid J, 1963, 41, 767-771.

Friedenberg, Edgar. The Vanishing Adolescent. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.

Gladstein, Gerald. "A new approach for identifying appropriate individual study behavior." School Review, 1963, 71, 158-169.

Hilgard, Ernest. "Human motives and the concept of self." American Psychologist, 1949, 4, 374-382.

Jordaan, Jean Pierre. "Exploratory behavior: The formation of self and occuptaional concepts" in Career Development: Self-concept Theory. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963, 42-78.

Kehas, Chris. "An analysis of self-concept theory and the application of the findings to the study of achievement in school." Unpublished thesis, February 1964.

Seidman, Jerome (ed.) The Adolescent. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960.

Shaw, Merville, Kenneth Edson, and Hugh Bell. "The self-concept of bright underachieving high school students as revealed by an adjective checklist." Personnel guid J, 1960, 39, 193-196.

Starishevsky, Reuben and Norman Matlin. "A model for the translation of self-concepts into vocational terms" in Career Development: Self-concept Theory. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963, 33-41.

Strong, Donald and Daniel Feder. "Measurement of the self-concept: a critique of the literature. J Counseling Psychol, 1961, 8, 170-178.

Super, Donald. "Self concepts in vocational development" in Career Development: Self-concept Theory. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963a, 1-16.

Super, Donald. "Toward making self-concept theory operational" in Career Development: Self-concept Theory. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1963b, 17-32.

Super, Donald. "Vocational adjustment: implementing a self-concept." Occupations, 1951, 30, 88-92.

Wrenn, C. Gilbert. The self-concept in counseling." J Counseling Psychol, 1958, 5, 104-109.

Wylie, Ruth. The self-concept. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1961.

------. Youth: Change and Challenge - Daedalus, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Winter 1962.